

PEOPLE & THINGS

THERE are still a few people who regard Government missions as a form of subsidised holiday, in which the ordinary hazards of travel are smoothed away and our representatives are bowered in comfort and consideration.

When I saw Mr. Geoffrey Eley, the leader of the British Trade Mission to Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan, shortly after his return to England last Wednesday, I soon learned how wrong this may be. Not that Mr. Eley had not enjoyed the strenuous journey, with its day-long sessions of intricate negotiation in a taxing and unfamiliar climate; but it was clear that much of the Mission's work had lain in that difficult border-country where commerce merges into diplomacy and the implications of a new contract, or an infusion of fresh capital, may go far beyond the ordinary confines of a business agreement.

Mr. Eley is, in private life, a connoisseur whose judgment has won him the friendship of Mr. Bernard Berenson; and I found him as compelling, and as lucid, on the subject of Luxor and Karnak as he was in evoking the sense of lofty public spirit with which General Nasser is addressing himself to the problems of a renaissance Egypt.

A Discerning Election

MONSIEUR JEAN COCTEAU'S election to the Académie Française must be accounted a triumph alike of insight and of assimilation on the part of that unpredictable institution.

Cocteau's gifts have never been properly savoured in this country. Only last week he was described on the wireless as "a playboy" and "a second-rater"—although, in point of fact, his record of work in many different fields would have killed off his ponderous antagonist in a month, and the second-rate is precisely what is lacking from his voluminous oeuvre.

His election to the Académie (an honour withheld, by the way, from Descartes, Molière, Pascal, Rousseau, Balzac and Baudelaire) must be ascribed to the least publicised of his glittering attributes: his genius for friendship. So persuasive is this that he contrived during his election campaign to secure as his foremost champion M. François Mauriac, who only two years ago attacked him with a bitterness unknown in this country since the age of Wilkes. Here, too, we glimpse a solidity of character which may be underrated by his English critics.

Grand Babylon

THE Westbury Hotel, which was opened last week with speeches by the American Ambassador and Mr. Peter Thorneycroft, is a triumph of packaging. The visiting executive will not find (and perhaps will not miss) the erratic luxury and splendid wastefulness which are the mark of the older European hotel. His taste-buds will not flower unexpectedly, for much of the Westbury is hideous; but he will be perfectly looked after, and he will fit into his room

By ATTICUS

as neatly as Rutland or Merloneth into an otherwise - completed county jigsaw-puzzle.

Breasting the hubbub of the opening, I searched among the several hundred uproarious visitors for one or two who would actually be seeing the Westbury through its first twenty-four hours - as full-blown residents. Eventually I was directed towards the elegantly anglicised figure of Mr. Danton Walker.

An Early Resident

MR. WALKER, who had been flown over to attend, and comment on, the opening of the hotel, is one of America's most widely-read columnists. Though trained on "tabloid" journals (and proud of it: "I could put 'War and Peace' into two hundred words if I had to") he cuts with a diamond, not a chopper; and in his dress and manner he could pass any day for the chairman of a private bank in New England.

He might issue himself an overdraft on the surength of the title he has chosen for his forthcoming memoirs: "Danton's Inferno."

A Vanishing Pastime

THE billiards-table in my club is being put up for sale. Thurston's (as I persist in calling it) is being pulled down to make way for offices. And billiards itself, a game hallowed by Mozart and cherished by many lesser beings for its delicate intricacy—billiards has been



Jacobean Billiards

overtaken in popularity by the clackety free-for-all known as snooker.

It is with no hope of arresting this sad process that I reproduce here an early seventeenth-century version of the game, in which the ball would appear to have been clubbed through hooped goal-posts and the players played with their hats on. Present-day billiards-table manufacturers (ake a purely antiquarian interest in this variant, which seems to them to date from the pre-history of the game.

H.R.H.?

I DON'T know if it constitutes contempt of court to question the accuracy of a Judge of the High Court, but I will venture a mild surprise at one passage in Mr. Justice Vaisey's judgment on

the claim of Prince Ernest August of Hanover to be a British subject.

Referring to the Order in Council of 1919 which deprived the Prince's father, as an enemy, of his British Dukedom of Cumberland and Earl-dom of Armagh, the Judge added that this did not affect his title as a Prince of Great Britain and Ireland or divest him of his style of Royal Highness.

But though, as the great-grandson in the male line of the last King of Hanover, Prince Ernest may be entitled to the style of Royal Highness in Germany, he has no claim to the British style of Royal Highness or to be described as a Prince of Great Britain and Ireland. The custom in this country, now and for some time past has been to limit the Royal styles to the children of the Sovereign and to the grandchildren in the male line. Thus the last of this line entitled to be described as a Prince of Great Britain and Ireland was the blind King George of Hanover, grandson of our George III, who lost his throne when Prussia annexed his kingdom in 1866.

Cash and Kind

IT is not considered polite in this country to pry into other people's financial affairs; and to proffer information about one's own is usually to invite misunderstanding.

Japanese public life knows no such scruples. Mr. Ichiro Hato-yama, the Prime Minister, has just retailed to an attentive public the details of his family budget. A monthly salary of £132, less tax, is not excessive, in relation to his high office and family household of fifteen persons. The eight servants enjoy an average weekly wage of 15s. 6d.; this, too, must be reckoned modest.

But the secret of the Prime Minister's budget lies in the subsidiary column headed "Gifts from supporters." Foodstuffs in Rabelaisian quantity, rice by the sack—these things are provided by loyal members of the Prime Minister's party. And if his gas bill is kept down to 15s. a week in the bitterest winter, it is thanks to gifts of charcoal from the same unstinting source.

I don't see it catching on in France.

The Great White Queen

I HEAR that one feature of the British Embassy compound in Bangkok attracted special attention during the to-ing and fro-ing of the recent conference: the bronze statue in which Queen Victoria, orb and sceptre in hand, is shown seated on a throne of bronze.

Changing fortunes have not affected this massive souvenir of the period in which Great Britain was the dominant power in the Far East. So great, indeed, is Queen Victoria's prestige in Siam that it is reckoned a great misfortune if harm comes to any one of her statues. Even the Japanese, when they invaded Siam in the 1940s, were awed by the sight of this particular image; and when they boarded up the statue to save it from damage by air attack, they left two slits for the Great White Queen's eyes, so that she could still dominate the scene in secret.

I doubt if she would be amused to find that British subjects are now compelled to petition for visas before entering Siam.